

# The Entrance to Covenant

*by: Ronald L. Dart*

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Are we under the new covenant? In a way it seems like an odd question, but it's a question I'm asked frequently. So, let's examine the question: are we under the new covenant? You know, years ago when personal computers first came out, all you had to work with was a black screen and green letters. So everything you did had to be done with a black screen and what you could put up there with a standard keyboard with a few extra symbols on it, and that's all there was to it. Now if you're a person who likes to play games, that poses lots of problems because you can't do all kinds of cut and shoot things with a computer when you've got nothing but a black screen with green letters on it. So some ingenious people got to work and they created what are called text-based games. In text-based games, the computer describes...it says "you have walked into a room" and then it's up to you; that's all it tells you. Then you have to look right, look left, look down, look up, look around in the room to try to find what might be there. And there may be objects in there that you can pick up and carry with you. And as a consequence you can work your way then, from room to room throughout this thing, picking up little bits of information and building in your mind a mental image of a labyrinth, of a maze, of a whole conglomeration of things. Now what happens to you, though, is because you can't see the room, because you have to ask everything you want to know, it is so easy to pass through a room and not see everything that is there.

So I found myself once in one of these situations where I had wandered through twice, I think, every room in the place and still couldn't get out of it; couldn't find a way; seemed to be absolutely up against it; there was absolutely no way to go from where I was to any place else. And then I thought, and I went back through all the rooms one more time, this time doing something I had not done before. In each room I looked up. And sure enough, in one of the rooms there was a hole and I was able to go up and go into a whole new part of the maze that was there for me study and find my way through.

Now a lot of times I feel the same way in studying the Bible. That I go into a room and I look around and I think I have seen everything there, but I haven't. And a lot of times it is necessary for us to go back through these things room by room, verse by verse, place by place, and ask ourselves "What is there here that, for one reason or another, I have not paid attention to?" Now you do understand that a lot of times our presuppositions, our preferences, influence what we see and what we do not see when we look at a passage of scripture. We see what we expect to see most times. This has been demonstrated again and again by psychologists and people who study this sort of thing. Human beings see what they

expect to see. And you can play a scene in front of a handful of people and you'll find almost as many different explanations of that scene as there are people who looked at it. Because all of us bring ourselves, with all that we are, to everything we come to.

So, consequently, if we go back today to take a look at some of the scriptures that have to do with this question, we might walk through it thinking "Well, what have I missed? What is it that I may have laid aside because it didn't fit some preconceived notion that I may have?" And to do that, let's turn back to Matthew the 26<sup>th</sup> chapter to the first instance in the New Testament of the Lord's Supper. Because it is here, and I believe this may be the very first place in all of the New Testament that the word 'covenant' is used. And, actually, if you're using the King James Version, it's not used here. In Matthew 26, verse 26, "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink you all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Now the word in the Greek is *diatheke*; it is precisely the same word that is used elsewhere in the New Testament when they are actually citing an Old Testament scripture about the covenant. So, I guess the Greeks did not, perhaps, have a word that would have fit exactly with the Old Testament covenant so they used this Greek word, which, in Greek, often means or refers to a Last Will and Testament of someone who has died. But it is used in this sense, as it is all the way through the New Testament, as the Greek word, the Greek translation of the Hebrew word for covenant. And so when you find it, generally speaking, you are better off to look at it as 'covenant' than you are as 'testament.' So Jesus said "Drink you all of it; For this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Now why on earth would we read that passage of scripture and have a question at all in our mind about whether or not we are under the New covenant? For, when we come to observe the Lord's Supper on the Passover each year, and that little cup of wine is passed out among us, we read this scripture, or others that say much the same thing; and it says "*Drink this, this is my blood of the new covenant.*" you are drinking, symbolically, the blood of the new covenant.

Now I've used this illustration before – I'll only take a moment to remind you of it. In ancient times, the means of entering into blood covenants was to actually cut yourself, take a little bit of your blood in a cup and give it to the other person who did the same for you. And you drank another person's blood. Symbolically, all it means is that I am your kin because I now have your blood in me and you have my blood in you. We have entered into a new relationship that didn't exist before. We are now blood brothers. We are all familiar with the old blood brotherhood among American Indians, where they would cut their hand, blood would be out, and they would clasp hands and mingle their blood together and thereby become blood brothers. So the idea of the blood covenant is a very, very old thing.

Now among Hebrews, the blood covenant in terms of the drinking of blood was prohibited and so it shifted with the Hebrews (and I think at one time, perhaps, it was the

drinking of the blood of a sacrificial animal, but God prohibited even that). So it became the sacrificial meal that became the means by which the covenants were entered into. Consequently, down through time, the symbolic bread and wine symbolizes the entering into of a covenant. That is what's happening here on this occasion. Jesus Christ is establishing a covenant with his disciples and it is a new covenant because it did not exist. This covenant, this relationship, never existed before this night. And so the new covenant is instituted at this time, in this way. He goes on to say "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink from now on of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives."

So right off the bat, we find clear evidence that the new covenant per se, started with the death of Jesus Christ. Actually started before the death of Jesus Christ as he entered into the covenant with his disciples on this night in which he was betrayed and before his death.

Now let's pass on down to Mark the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter where the same incident is addressed. We have now another person's testimony as to what he say and what was done on this night. Mark 14:22 *"As they did eat, Jesus took bread and blessed and broke it and said 'take eat, this is my body'"* Now not much is said in relation to the body and it gets left out of most Christian theology for some reason, but we learn later on a bit more about what the body is about. But, when you understand that in ancient times, the entering into of a covenant was a matter of a sacrificial meal that involved the eating of the flesh of an animal, then you begin to understand that Jesus' flesh and his blood was a part of this covenant. "And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink you all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink from now on of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." And after they had sung a hymn, they went out into the dark.

Now passing on down to Luke, chapter 22, there's a little more detail in Luke's account. He says in chapter 22, verse One, "Now the feast of unleavened bread drew near, which is called the Passover. And the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him; for they feared the people. Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him to them." They were happy about that. They covenanted to give him money. Then verse 7, " Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed. And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat." And for generations there's been discussions about whether or not this really the Passover, whether it was a pre-Passover meal, whether or not Jesus was using one calendar and the Pharisees were another, all these things go on, these arguments and discussions go on forever it seems like.

Well, if verse 13, *"They went and found as he had said to them, and they made ready the Passover."* So this covenant that we're talking about was established in connection with

the Passover. "And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said to them, With desire I have desired..." – now this is a curious expression, and what it is talking about is "I have had a intense desire to eat this Passover with you before I suffer: For I say to you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and broke it, and gave to them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you." Every single time this comes up this is clear: *"this is the new covenant in my blood and they drank it."* To any Hebrew this would have meant you enter into a covenant at this time on this occasion and in this manner. So why would anyone think that we were not in, or that it was not that way, that we did not enter into the new covenant. They didn't at that time and why would they conclude that?

Now turn back to 1 Corinthians 11. These scriptures are all very familiar to us because they are the ones we go through every year at Passover time. 1 Corinthians 11:23, "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered to you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do you, as oft as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you do show the Lord's death till he come." Then he begins to address the manner in which they had been observing it which was unworthy, the manner of it was unworthy, they had done things in a way that they should not have done them. And he addresses many of these things, but the key element I think to see through here is again, again and again, both the three synoptic gospels and Paul all identify clearly that this was the blood of the new covenant that they took on this night of the last supper. And it is very difficult in the face of this to say, no, no, no, we're not under the new covenant. That the new covenant is something off in the future when Christ comes back to this earth again, isn't it? I mean it's right there staring at you off the page so how would you sidestep this?

But there's more. Turn back to 2 Corinthians, chapter 3, Now Paul is addressing a problem: the relationship that existed between **himself** and the Corinthian church, which was a stormy one I gather. And he writes them in chapter 3 and he said *"Do I have to commend myself again to you? Or do I need like some other people, epistles of commendation to you, like credentials, that I've got to bring in with you? Or letters of credential from you? Do I need anything like that? After all, you are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men."* If I needed any credentials, the very existence of the Corinthian church is the credential. "For as much as you are manifestly declared to be the letter of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart." Now this is interesting that he uses this allusion we see, because

what Paul is talking about here is the very core element of the new covenant – one of them. And that is that the law of God is written no longer in tables of stone, but in the fleshly tables of the heart. And God says concerning the covenant, the time is going to come when I will write my laws in their hearts and in their minds I will write them. And this allusion should not be lost on anyone. And then he says “And such trust have we through Christ to Godward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.” And then he says something very interesting, “who also has made us...spirit gives life.” Now what are you suppose to make of that? I mean how can we ask are we under the new covenant now when Paul spoke of himself and those men who worked with him in the plural, he said “*we are able ministers of the new covenant?*” Paul wasn’t a minister of the old covenant. He wasn’t a Levite. He wasn’t a son of Aaron. He was a Benjamite. But he was an able minister of the new covenant, which he took all over wherever he went among the Gentiles. So all of this seems to be a fairly clear description of all this, doesn’t it?

Now some of the confusion arises from the Book of Hebrews. So if you’ll come back with me to Hebrews, chapter 7, we’ll take a look at what is said here. And I really feel that mistakes are made as people read through this, because we read assumptions back into this that somehow we’ve picked up along the way and don’t really look at what it said here and what Paul, or the writer of Hebrews, is trying to tell us. Hebrews chapter 7, and I’ll begin in verse 21 “(For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said to him, The Lord swore and will not repent, You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:) By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament.” Once again, don’t stumble over this word ‘testament’ because what he is talking about, very clearly, is a covenant relationship that we are to enter into. They were priests because they were not...you know...there were many of them because they didn’t continue by reason of death. They died so there had to be another one, if you follow his reasoning. This man, because he continues forever has an unchangeable priesthood.

Now in chapter 8 he says this “*Of the things which we have spoken this is the sum:*” In chapter 8 what the writer is doing is kind of wrapping up his long argument that he has made up until this point, most of which has to do with the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood – the superiority of Jesus Christ over Levi. That, you know, among Hebrews of this time, the Levites, the sons of Aaron who served in the temple, these were the people who led the people. And as a result of that, many of them might not have appreciated the importance of Jesus Christ and his rulership over the church. So Paul is making the point: this is not merely just another priest; this is the son of God we’re talking about. Alright, he says “ We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: why it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer. For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law.” And most commentators who read that assume from this statement that this letter was written before

the destruction of the temple because it speaks of priests in the present tense. “ Who serve to the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, said he, that you make all things according to the pattern showed to you in the mount. But now has he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.”

Now, if you read this in a straightforward fashion, you can't miss what it said here. It says that Jesus is the mediator of a better covenant. Not that he will be; he is. So consequently once again we are left with the idea that the covenant, the Christian covenant, is. It's not something that will be. It's not something off in the future somewhere. We are able to enter that covenant right now. Then he goes on to say this “ For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second..” If the first covenant had been enough, if it had been all that was needed, if it would have done everything that was to be done, nobody would have ever looked for another one. “ For finding fault with them, he said, Behold, the days come, said the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.” And it is from this verse, which is a citation out of Jeremiah (I believe Jeremiah 31) that the idea of the new covenant comes from. But there's a problem here and the astute reader will pick it up. This covenant says nothing about Gentiles. This covenant is made with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It is a new covenant to be made with these people which has not yet been made. That's why we look at this one here and he says “ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, said the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: ” Now if you'll go back and read Jeremiah 31, you are left clearly with the impression we are talking about the end time and the final reconciliation of Israel to God.

So consequently, the days come, they are off in the future, when Israel will be reconciled with Judah, both of them will be reconciled to God, and God will enter into a new covenant with these people. Not like the old one that he entered into with them before. And so many people look at this and they say “Well, see when it says down here at the end ‘...*new covenant he has made the first old. Now that which decays and waxes old is ready to vanish away.*” And they say “See there, the old covenant has not passed away.” And they are absolutely correct. It has not. It is still there. It is still the covenant between God and Israel, which also, by the way, requires circumcision for any son of Israel. But that's a national covenant. That's a covenant with a people. Not a covenant with individuals. The new covenant that we talk about...generally when we use the term “new covenant”, we're not talking about this covenant in Hebrews 8. We're talking about the Christian covenant. We're talking about the covenant that Jesus made with his disciples in the night in which he was betrayed and which we, every year, remember in the observance of what some people call the Lord's Supper, others call the Passover, others call Communion, but which is the taking of the bread and wine as a symbol of the broken body and the shed blood of Jesus Christ. These are the things that we have to grapple with. Now, in the baptismal service we ask

people “Do you accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and your soon coming King and High Priest?”

Some of you probably remember having heard those words in the process of your baptism because, in the old days, we had a formula, and you were suppose to stick to that formula come what may under pain of discipline if you actually varied by one word, dot, you know, tittle, comma or what have you, from the prescribed formula. You get a person into the waters of baptism and “Do you accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior?” “Yes, I do.” “Do you accept him as your soon coming King and High Priest?” “Yes, I do.” And under the water a person goes. And I got to thinking about that and I wonder if we think of him more as a future King than as a present King? Think about that. You’re in the waters of baptism, you’re ready to be put under the water and the minister looks you in the eyeballs and says “Do you accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior? As your present, here and now, King and Ruler?” You got to say “Yes” and say it from the heart. Not your soon coming King, not your King some day, but your King right here, right now, the One over your life. Now see this is the one moment in time when you have to make a positive response to a question of fealty to Jesus Christ – at baptism. And I really sometimes wonder what goes through our minds and what has gone through the minds of many people in the past that I have baptized. Are they thinking “King some day” or are they thinking King right now with all that that implies. And I wonder, you know, if we...baptism is a moment of decision and if we...accept Jesus as our King right here and right now, we have made a momentous decision in our lives. And I really wonder if some of us don’t think of ourselves as being in a passive covenant that God has made with us. And that we ourselves have actually made no covenant with God. You may want to spend some time delving into yourself on that issue. You know, you’ve been baptized, maybe. If you haven’t, you still got that ahead of you to think about. At some point in time, you understand that Jesus Christ’s blood shed for your sins, that they removed your sins, they took away your guilt, they open the door for a relationship with God, God invites you into His family and into His home as it were. And so along you come. And so you have passively entered into a covenant that God has made with you. The question is have you made a covenant with God? And that’s a different matter all together. And I really think perhaps somewhere in all of this lies an answer to a troubling paradox that keeps bothering people.

One thing, for example, that we know (and I’ve made this point in recent years, I think, very clearly) that on the Day of Atonement when the priest went through the ceremony of the killing of the animals and making atonement for himself and for the house of Israel, and he’d kill the blood of one goat and carried it in and sprinkled it, and came back out and sent the other goat away in the wilderness, I keep asking people what was it that the children of Israel had to do on the Day of Atonement? The answer? Nothing. Somebody said well they had to fast. And my point is that fasting is nothing. That’s not doing something. That’s not doing anything. You do nothing on the Day of Atonement except you stand there while the priest goes through and makes an atonement for you and all the house of Israel. Right? What this means is, at the point of salvation, at the point of justification, there is

nothing you can do for yourself. Justification is by faith alone. Justification is by the grace of God, not of works lest any man should boast. There is not one law you can keep, there is not one thing you can do to actually accomplish your own justification. That's all done for you by Jesus Christ. All you've got to do is nothing. But then you start reading the Bible and you find in the New Testament, not to mention the Old, obligation after obligation, after obligation, after obligation, and they are layered up, one on top of the other, of the demands that God makes of us and expects us to come through and gives us the very distinct impression that there are dire consequences if we don't come through so that we understand salvation, that is justification, is by Grace. But it is very clear that there is another side to this equation that I fear, all too often, has not been addressed. God has made a covenant with us. Have we made a covenant with Him? Have we at any time voluntarily and consciously entered our own covenant with promises and with obligations?

In recent years I have increasingly emphasized the covenant relationship implied in the Lord's Supper on the Passover. And as I've done this, more and more, I have come to feel the weight of the obligations that are imposed upon us by the things that are there. Now every year at the Passover service, we read through those passages of John 14 through John 17. Now I want to go back to them today to take that fresh look. Visit this room again and consider what is here that we might not have picked up and added to our inventory. What is here that we have not, perhaps, grasped and dealt with as we might have. In John chapter 14:12 "Truly, truly, I say to you, [this is probably the longest speech Jesus makes anywhere in the entire Bible and it's really worth your attention] Truly, truly, I say to you, He that believes on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to my Father. And whatever you shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." That's why we close our prayers "in Jesus' name." Now, now that we are in the room, and we're looking around in the room to see what's here and see what we may have mis-grasped or maybe misunderstood, is that what Jesus meant by this? That when you pray, you pray and close your prayer in Jesus' name? Well, most of us understand that the expression "in the name of" basically means by the authority of as used in the Bible. In other words, you are asking this by the authority of Jesus Christ.

But I want to stop for a moment and look at this from a little different perspective. I was reading not long ago, a statement on governments that was published by, you know, a paper on governments that was published by the United Church of God who were wrestling through with questions of how the church should be governed. And I was fascinated as I read through the document the attention it was giving to government in every different angle. And at one point in the document I stopped because, as I was reading through it, they began to talk about marriage as a governmental relationship. In other words, that a man governs his wife and governs his children and so forth and so on. And they didn't spend a lot of time developing it, but it stopped me when I got to that point. I had to stop and lean back in my chair and stare at the ceiling for a minute because something wasn't working for me in that statement. And what wasn't working for me in that statement was the awareness that, again that has grown on me for some period of time, that marriage is not a governmental relationship.



Now, if you're going to look at everything in the world is a question of government, you're going to miss something along the way. And the truth is marriage is not a governmental relationship – it is a covenant relationship, which is not the same thing. This we need to understand, this we need to grasp. Marriage is a covenant relationship. Now back in Ephesians 5 there is a passage of scripture that is often cited in sermons *“Wives be subject to your husbands in all things just like he would be to Christ and — “and you’ll heard preachers go through the one side of this whole question about all the wife’s obligations to their husbands. The fact is, and every one of the women know this, there’s another part of that passage of scripture where all the husband’s obligations for the wife are laid down. Right? Now one thing that should be clear to anybody who reads Ephesians 5 and goes through those things about marriage and the responsibility of a man and the responsibilities of a woman, this is a covenant. This is a deal. And if you don’t maintain both sides of a deal, you don’t have a deal. Right? You’re selling your house. If both of you, you and the buyer, don’t sign that contract, do you have a deal? No, you don’t have a deal. If you both sign the contract and then one of you breaks the terms of the contract, do you have a deal? You don’t have a deal. You may have to go to court to enforce the terms of the contract, but you really don’t have a deal when somebody doesn’t fulfill his side of the bargain. And so consequently, neither partner in a marriage can claim the responsibilities laid on the other part of the marriage unless they pick up that obligation which belongs to them. That ought to be clear that marriage is a covenant relationship.*

Now, I’m going to come back here to John in just a moment, but I want to take a moment to go back to Ephesians because there’s an important concept that Paul develops here. Ephesians 5:22, now notice here’s the argument: “ Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.” And you can slam the book shut at this case and preach a real good sermon straightening out all the women in the church. But Paul didn’t stop there as all the women know. “ Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies.” It’s the covenant, both side of this have got to take care of their part of the deal. Now in verse 31: “ For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined to his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.” That’s what a covenant is all about. *“This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”* You know the fact of the matter is that this whole section in here that Paul is going through about man and wife, and marriage and so forth, and the mutual covenant relationship is actually about the church and Christ. That that is a covenant relationship also, not merely a governmental relationship. And there are implications on that that go way down the road that I don’t think many of us have really ever dealt with completely. That just as a husband has to pick up responsibilities for his wife, and the wife has to pick up responsibilities for her husband, so the church has to be pick up

responsibilities for Christ. That we each have obligations to Christ, for Christ, and we must never allow those things to get away from us.

He says this back in John 14 “ And whatever you shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.” Now I want you to understand something. My wife can enter into deals in my name because she carries my name. We actually can do things for one another, on behalf of one another. In other words, we are able to act together because we have a covenant relationship. Okay? “In my name” basically means more than just by my authority. She carries my name. Now Paul says *“I speak concerning Christ and the church”* and he says *“If you ask anything in my name...”* Now what this may be saying to us, more than just merely saying “Well, I’m doing this in Jesus’ authority,” you can claim that; that doesn’t mean you’ve got it. Just because you close your prayer in Jesus’ name, doesn’t mean that you are in Jesus’ name. For to be in Jesus’ name may well mean you have got to be in the covenant relationship with Jesus Christ with all that that entails. What does that entail? Well, first of all he says “Here’s my side: whatever you ask in my name I will do it, if you love me, keep my commandments.” Now there’s a little paragraph mark in the King James Version between those two statements that doesn’t belong there because these two verses go together. *“If you ask anything in my name I will do it. If you love me, you’ll keep my commandments.”* I’ll respond to your request, you’ll respond to mine. So that we are expected to enter into a covenant relationship with God which involves being able to say to Christ the same thing he says to us. *“If you ask anything in my name, I will do it.”*

Now we have two shots at this along the way as to the points in which we normally enter this covenant. One is at baptism. When the minister, I guess; and I think that in the future I am well do this, is to talk about...have you repented of your sins, of the transgression of God’s holy and righteous law? And they will tell me yes, and I will ask them do you accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and as your King, and your Ruler here and now? Because that’s a moment in time. That’s a moment of truth when you have got to say “Yes I do” and mean it to the core of your being. Because you are not merely a passive recipient in this relationship. You need to actively enter into the covenant with Jesus Christ. Justification, you’re passive. Rescuing your wretched rear end, you’re passive. But from there on in, you may not be passive. You must be an active member of the covenant relationship. That’s something that I’m not sure a lot of Christians have got straight in their heads. And Jesus said it: I’ll do what you ask in my name, but you have got to be keeping my commandments as well.

John 15:1 “ I am the true vine, and my Father is the farmer. Every branch in me that bears not fruit he takes away: and every branch that bears fruit, he purges it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now you are clean through the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can you, except you abide in me.” These are the words of covenant, folks. You stay in me; I’ll stay in you. It’s blood. It’s a blood covenant and it must be willing, consciously,

deliberately entered into by the parties of the covenant. "I am the vine, you are the branches: He that stays in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing." Now back when I was trained in baptismal counseling, one of the things we had to do, it was all down in an outline which we had in our Bibles actually; had a little sheet back in the Bible that we had to go through and to be sure, before we baptized somebody that we went through all the necessary things. One of these was Luke 14. And I'll have to tell you the truth, in my old understanding of this, when it was first explained to me and gone through relative to baptism, I honestly didn't know what it was all about. Because in Luke 14, Jesus says this – just to get you in the picture of what we're talking about. Luke 14:25 "And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said to them, If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brothers, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple."

Now think about that. Sure, justification, the forgiveness of sins, the putting our feet on the right path, that's all free and by the grace of God. But, what does it mean when it says you got to pick up your cross and follow Christ? It means that you've got something you have to do as a part of this deal. "For which of you, intending to build a tower, sits not down first, and counts the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish." And he goes on with another illustration, and finally says "So likewise, whoever he be of you that forsakes not all that he has, he cannot be my disciple."

Now I'll tell you the truth, the first time this was explained to me preparatory to my own baptism, I don't think I took it seriously enough. The illustrations, I think, that were given to me were "Well, someday you can find somebody and you can have a bayonet in your belly and somebody is telling you that you are going to have to work on the Sabbath day, are you going to be willing to take the bayonet rather than work on the Sabbath day? And because it was way off in the future, I said "Of course. I don't have any choice. It's God's law. I have to obey God." My attitude was count the cost? There's nothing to count because there's no choice. The kingdom of God is out here, the pearl of great price, all these things, they are the treasure hid in the field. No, no, no, I don't need to count the cost; I'll do it. And we go under the waters of baptism. I really think that that is oftentimes read with very, very limited understanding. That the truth is, it's not something out there some day that we're talking about. This is going – if you're thinking about baptism this afternoon, this is going to start costing you tomorrow. Maybe tonight. Because at the point of time where you say to God, before God in the presence of witnesses, "I repent of my sins, I accept Jesus Christ as my personal Savior, and as my Lord and Master" that means whatever he says, I do tonight, tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, and so forth right on down the road.

Now what am I talking about here? Are we under the new covenant? Well, we can be, but I'm not so sure that we should always just say "Oh yeah, of course, I'm under the new

covenant." Because it seems from what we read here today, that it's not enough to merely be the recipient of the grace of God. That somewhere along the line you have got to make a decision; a conscious, deliberate decision to accept that covenant. To enter that covenant. To take on the obligations of that covenant. And to take up your cross and follow him.

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